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# Webster Boosted Morale, Lent Stability to CIA

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By RUTH SINAI

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Over at Langley, he's known as Mild Bill. But the moniker is not meant to be unkind, for CIA Director William Webster is well liked, a straight arrow who has brought the intelligence agency much-needed reassurance and balance during troubling times.

In a town where reputations are tarnished easily, Webster, a former judge and FBI director, earned distinction for his trouble-shooting skills, his ability to root out misconduct in government and fix it without making too many people angry.

His successor, however, will need to be able to plot the course of the U.S. intelligence community on a new world map drawn by the demise of communism and the rise of well-armed Third World powers.

President Bush announced the 67-year-old Webster's retirement Wednesday. No date was set for his last day.

CIA insiders say Bush, while clearly appreciative of Webster's contribution, has wanted to replace him with someone who can craft the nation's intelligence mission to fit U.S. needs in a quickly changing world.

Robert Gates, currently President Bush's deputy national security adviser and the former No. 2 man at the CIA under the late William Casey, is one of two front-runners on a short list known to administration and congressional officials.

The other is James Lilley, a former CIA case officer and friend of the president's who is ending his job as ambassador to China this week.

Gates was nominated for the CIA job in 1987 by President Reagan but withdrew his name in the face of questions about his role in the Iran-Contra arms and money scandal. However, many members of the Senate Intelligence Committee say they would recommend the 25-year agency veteran for the post if he's picked.

Gates would have Webster's backing, insiders say.

Webster's detractors say he was almost too straight for an agency whose role is often synonymous with dirty deeds. He has also been faulted for lacking the ideas needed to adapt the intelligence community to a changing world, and the foreign affairs and intelligence experience to move the CIA away from its classic Cold War missions.

But there's broad agreement that Webster did exactly what he was asked to do by Reagan when he was handed control of the CIA four years ago.

"Through his well-deserved reputation as a person of total integrity and his devotion to the rule of law, he has provided the best possible leadership for the intelligence community," said Sen. David Boren, the Oklahoma Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Webster inherited an agency shaken by accusations that Casey broke the law in the Iran-Contra affair and lied about it to Congress.

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There was a perception in the agency that the CIA was the whipping boy over the Iran-Contra affair," said Vincent Cannistraro, who served as the CIA's counterterrorism chief until last summer.

Not only did Webster restore morale, he greatly eased tensions with Congress by reporting and consulting regularly with the intelligence committees on Capitol Hill.

Casey "basically didn't like oversight and resisted it in a way that Bill Webster did not and does not," said Sen. William Cohen of Maine, the senior Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Webster, a former U.S. attorney and federal appellate judge in St. Louis, has a firm grounding in the law that made him an invaluable asset in cleaning up the FBI and CIA.

His reputation was such that Jimmy Carter picked him to head the FBI in 1978, even though he was a Republican. He took control of the nation's top law enforcement agency as it struggled to heal a legacy of bruises left by the personal vendettas carried out for legendary FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, the illegal surveillance of dissenters in the Vietnam War and attempts by FBI officials to hamper investigation of the Watergate scandal.

In nine years at the helm, Webster instituted tough rules against misconduct that earned him bipartisan respect in Congress.

At the CIA, too, one of Webster's first tasks was to discipline those who were accused of aiding in the Iran-Contra affair.

Much of his time also was consumed with trying to adjust to a shrinking budget - at least 10 percent less last year than previously - and to reassess the nature of the threat from the Soviet Union as it moved away from hardline communism and toward economic and social decline.

Webster disagreed on the nature of the Soviet threat with Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, who urged far more caution than the CIA chief felt was warranted.

Webster also disagreed with the administration's handling of the Panama invasion, saying the United States placed too much emphasis on apprehending dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega.

But generally, he toed the official line and won warm praise from Bush - himself a popular CIA director when he served in 1976 and 1977.

Webster intends to go into private legal practice, and wants to devote more time to his wife, whom he married last year after being widowed in 1984.